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Winchester Select Board puts ARPA grants on hold

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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The Griffin Museum is one of the nonprofits that has applied for ARPA funds from the town. The Select Board will make a decision on which organizations receive the OK for the money on Sept. 23. FILE PHOTO

Which of Winchester's nonprofits will get the stamp of approval from town officials after submitting wish lists totaling $575,000 to be funded by APRA money? The Select Board was expected to vote on a final list toni 23.

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Roughly $266,000 in requests were brought to the Select Board for approval during a recent meeting. The board had set aside $300,000 of ARPA funding specifically for Community Needs grants.

The American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA, is federal funding aimed at helping communities recover from the economic blow dealt by COVID-19. Local nonprofits were invited to apply for funding.

Select Board member Anthea Brady said it was nice to see such a wide range of proposals.

Grants applications were received from the following organizations: Winchester Community Music School, Conservation Commission/Permanent, Street Tree Committee, Council on Aging (COA), Winchester Cultural District, Network for Social Justice, En Ka Society, Winchester Farmers Market, Friends of Winchester Recreation, Griffin Museum, Winchester Historical Society, Winchester Meals on Wheels, Network for Social Justice/WLF/FAN Town Common Task Force, WinCAM, Winchester ABC, WinPAC and Wright-Locke Farm Conservancy.

The process

Brady, along with her board colleague, Bill McGonicle, reviewed the applications with assists from comptroller Stacie Ward and Town Manager Beth Rudolph.

“We carved out the ones that we thought were best suited for ARPA and most likely to get done in the time frame that we are working on,” McGonigle said.

In a memo to the board, Brady and McGonigle wrote that all the applications were reviewed “in regard to what coordination (if a be necessary with Town Departments to implement the proposed

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initiatives, how the proposed initiatives would impact ongoing Town efforts, whether the proposed initiatives created potential liabilities for the Town, and whether there was risk of not meeting the federal reporting requirements for ARPA funds."

McGonigle said he was happy to give more detail on projects and why they thought they were a good or not so good idea, but otherwise recommended the board fund the 14 proposals brought forth.

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior said she wasn't going to ask a lot of questions, instead she was going to trust the process. She also said it was great they could fund so many projects since initially they thought they'd only be able to make six to 10 awards.

But board member Michael Bettencourt said he thought it would be more helpful to see all the proposals.

"Because I think the issue would be who didn't get funded here and why?" he said. "I'm not sure at the funding level, if it gets everybody where they need to go."

He also questioned some proposals that were only partially funded.

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McGonigle said some of the project's timelines simply went too far past the ARPA deadline. For example, he said the Sanborn House was looking to fund three years worth of programming, but ARPA money must be spent by the end of the year.

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As for partial funding, he added that in the case of WinCam's proposal for the purchase and installation of new equipment, it required approval and coordination with other departments, in this case, the School Department.

"We thought that giving them what was the bulk of what they asked for, which was the funding for the equipment, which is not going to spoil or go bad, they'd be able to get installed as soon as they could," McGonigle explained. "And they seemed confident they'd be able to get the funds necessary for that installation."

And some things, such as a request from Meals on Wheels to cover $500 in advertising, were beyond the scope of ARPA fund usage, he added.

McGonigle offered to go over each project with Bettencourt right then because he thought it important to get things moving immediately. He also reminded Bettencourt he and Brady were tasked with reading through the applications and bringing forward the ones that best fit the ARPA regulations, which he called "not a small amount of paperwork."

Brady also offered Bettencourt a quick walk through on their thinking and the math that went into the decisions, but Bettencourt said he'd prefer to put the vote off to the next meeting just so he could take a closer look.

"I didn't understand that we would just be kind of deferring the entire ARPA appropriation decision just to two members," he said. "I thought it was more that we were going to have an ongoing discussion about this."

Rudolph noted the clock was ticking for the applicants because they were given only 30 days to spend the money and McGonigle and Brady reiterated their decisions were not made lightly.

But Prior agreed the vote on the proposals would be put off until Sept. 23. She suggested that in the interim, any questions be brought to

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Brady, McGonigle, Rudolph, Ward or herself so they could put the item on the consent agenda for Town Meeting and simply vote it up or down or make adjustments as needed on Sept. 23.

She also pointed out there was a process to the choices made.

“It wasn’t like it was everyone’s favorites,” Prior said. “It was what fits, what are the rules and that’s what we should do. So thanks for doing it.”

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Celebrate Women’s History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women’s History Month and International Women’s Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester’s School Committee will face voters at [illegible] the district navigates a new lite[illegible], budget pressures and questi[illegible] student mental health. Heather von Mering

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Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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